



# **Scope of practice and standards of competence for registered nurses 2025**

Information for nurses  
February 2025

# Why the changes?

The Nursing Council has introduced changes to the scope of practice and is implementing new standards of competence for registered nurses.

The Nursing Council, under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the Act), is required to determine scopes of practice and standards of competence. The Council regularly reviews these documents to ensure nurses are equipped to meet the challenges of today's complex healthcare environment. The current scope and standards of competence (previously called competencies) were last reviewed in 2016.



# Major shifts – Scope of practice – Registered Nurse (RN)

- Recognises **Te Tiriti o Waitangi and kawa whakaruruhau (cultural safety in the Māori context) and cultural safety** as foundational to nursing practice.
- Recognises the importance of substantive scientific and nursing knowledge to inform comprehensive assessments, determine health needs, **develop differential diagnoses**, plan care and determine appropriate interventions. Interventions are evaluated based on clinical, professional and scientific knowledge.
- Responsible for delivering **whakapapa-centred care** across the life span.
- Responsible for providing **support and guidance** to enrolled nurses and directing and delegating to other team members.
- The revised scope has expanded the potential of nursing practice and has informed the development of the new standards of competence.



# Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The Council recognises the importance of nursing practice that supports kawa whakaruruhau, culturally safe care and promotes equitable health outcomes. The standards of competence incorporate the articles and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.



# Incorporating te reo Māori (the Māori language) and Māori concepts:

The Council recognises the importance of preserving te reo Māori and Māori culture in nursing practice and education. This commitment promotes cultural competency, inclusivity and respect for Māori culture and values within the nursing profession. Ensuring cultural understanding is essential for providing equitable healthcare for everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The standards of competence include both Māori kupu (words) and English terms. These are not direct translations but are used together to add depth and meaning. The *pou* (pillar) is a significant symbol in Māori culture, representing identity, heritage and the connection to land and traditions. In this context, the *pou* tells the story of core nursing values and the integration of a Māori worldview into professional practice.



# Common kupu in scope and standards of competence

**Pou:** a pillar or anchor that supports and guides the foundations of practice.

**Whakapapa:** understanding relationships and ancestry.

**Manaakitanga:** care, respect, and hospitality.

**Whanaungatanga:** forming and maintaining relationships.

**Kawa Whakaruruhau:** cultural safety in Māori context.

**Pūkengatanga:** expertise, skill, competence, depth of knowledge and ability.

**Rangatiratanga:** in nursing upholds the dignity, rights and values of all, addressing the needs and aspiration of Māori.

**Rongoā:** Traditional Māori medicine.



# Registered Nurse – scope of practice

Registered nurses in Aotearoa New Zealand incorporate knowledge, concepts and worldviews of both tangata whenua and tangata tiriti into practice. Registered nurses uphold and enact ngā mātāpono – principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, based on the kawa whakaruruhau framework and cultural safety, promoting equity, inclusion, diversity, and rights of Māori as tangata whenua. These concepts also relate to Pacific peoples and all population groups to support quality services that are culturally safe and responsive.

Registered nurses are accountable and responsible for their nursing practice, ensuring that all health care provided is consistent with their education, assessed competence, relevant legislative requirements, and is guided by the Nursing Council of New Zealand's standards for registered nurses.

Registered nurses use substantial scientific and nursing knowledge to inform comprehensive assessments, determine health needs, develop differential diagnoses, plan care and determine appropriate interventions. Interventions are evaluated to assess care outcomes based on clinical judgement and scientific and professional knowledge.

Registered nurses practise independently and in collaboration with individuals, their whānau, communities and the interprofessional healthcare team to deliver equitable person/whānau/ whakapapa-centred nursing care across the life span in all settings. Registered nurses may also use their expertise in areas and roles such as leadership, management, education, policy and research. Conditions may be placed on the scope of practice of some registered nurses, dependent on their qualifications and/or experience, limiting them to a specific area of practice. Nurses who have additional experience and have completed the required education will be authorised by the Council to prescribe some medicines within their area of practice and level of competence.

Registered nurses are responsible and accountable for directing and delegating to members of the healthcare team. Registered nurses provide support and guidance to enrolled nurses.

For the avoidance of doubt in other legislation where nurse is defined, this scope of practice includes general nursing and nursing functions.



# What is kawa whakaruruhau and whakapapa-centred care?

**Kawa whakaruruhau** can be understood as cultural safety in the Māori context within nursing, ensuring that care is respectful and responsive to the cultural needs and identities of Māori. It means providing an environment where Māori feel safe, respected and understood, without fear of discrimination. It requires nurses to reflect on their discrimination and bias and the impact that this has on recipients of care.

**Whakapapa-centred care** refers to care that acknowledges a person's heritage, family connections and identity. It goes beyond treating physical symptoms by incorporating a deeper understanding of the individual's background, values and relationships, particularly for Māori. This approach emphasises the importance of a patient's connections to family and ancestors as central to their well-being.



# Direction and delegation has changed

- Enrolled nurses must work with access to and **seek support and guidance from registered nurses when appropriate.**
- Registered nurses will provide support and guidance to enrolled nurses as required.
- Registered nurses still direct and delegate in some instances (e.g. when assigning care) and to other health workers.
- Good communication between registered nurses and enrolled nurses, teamwork and working effectively together are key for safe care.



# What is differential diagnoses?

- Registered nurses use critical thinking and decision making to assess a patient and make a clinical judgement on what the health issue might be, in order to develop a plan of care.
- Differential diagnoses have become a key element of nursing practice that incorporate history taking, physical assessment and clinical reasoning skills. As part of an interprofessional healthcare team, nurses contribute their expertise to evaluate symptoms, interpret findings and consider various conditions.
- Differential diagnoses are not a definitive diagnosis, but a step before determining what condition is causing a person's presenting symptoms as there are different conditions that often share similar symptoms. The nurse then reports observed symptoms and what action has been taken to the primary clinician (doctor, nurse practitioner) before a definitive diagnosis is made.
- This level of critical thinking develops with practice from novice to expert.



# Registered nurse standards of competence

**Pou one:** Māori health

**Pou two:** Cultural safety

**Pou three:** Whanaungatanga and communication

**Pou four:** Pūkengatanga and evidence-informed nursing practice

**Pou five:** Manaakitanga and people-centredness

**Pou six:** Rangatiratanga and leadership

*Each pou has descriptors which identify the requirements for the pou.*



# Pou one and two in everyday practice

## **Pou one: Māori health**

Reflecting a commitment to Māori health, registered nurses must support, respect and protect Māori rights while advocating for equitable and positive health outcomes. Nurses are also required to demonstrate kawa whakaruruhau by addressing power imbalances and working collaboratively with Māori.

## **Pou two: Cultural safety**

Cultural safety in nursing practice ensures registered nurses provide culturally safe care that is inclusive, responsive and equitable. This requires nurses to reflect on their practice and understand their cultural identity and the power imbalances between the nurse and the recipient of care.



# Pou three and four in everyday practice

## **Pou three: Whanaungatanga and communication**

A commitment to whanaungatanga and communication, requires registered nurses to establish relationships through the use of effective communication strategies which are culturally appropriate and reflect concepts such as whānau-centred care and cultural safety. An understanding of different forms of communication enables the nurse to engage with the interprofessional healthcare team, advocate for innovative change where appropriate and influence the direction of the profession.

## **Pou four: Pūkengatanga and evidence-informed nursing practice**

Pūkengatanga and evidence-informed nursing practice requires registered nurses to use clinical skills, coupled with critical thinking informed by high quality and current evidence to provide quality, safe nursing care. Evidence-informed practice prepares the nurse to differentially diagnose, plan care, identify appropriate interventions, lead the implementation and evaluate care provision and outcomes.



# Pou five and six in everyday practice

## **Pou five: Manaakitanga and people-centred care**

Manaakitanga and people-centred care requires nurses to demonstrate compassion, collaboration and partnership to build trust and shared understanding between the nurse and people, whānau or communities. Compassion, trust and partnership underpin effective decision-making in the provision of care to support the integration of beliefs and preferences of people and their whānau.

## **Pou six: Rangatiratanga and leadership**

Rangatiratanga and leadership in nursing practice is demonstrated when nurses proactively provide solutions and lead innovation to improve the provision of care. Leadership requires all nurses to act as change agents and lead change when appropriate. Fundamental to the integration of leadership is the need for nurses to intervene, speak out, and advocate to escalate concerns on behalf of, colleagues or recipients of care.



# Registered nurses: non-direct clinical roles

- The standards are designed at a level that enables every registered nurse to apply them in the practice context where they work.
- Practice is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care.
- Nursing practice extends to a role where the nurse uses their nursing skills and knowledge. Practice includes working in non-clinical roles such as in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory, policy development roles that impact on safe, effective delivery of services.
- Registered nurses are responsible for their own practice and work in collaborative relationships with other healthcare professionals.



# In general

## **Do I need to undertake any additional education to meet the new standards of competence?**

- It may take some time to familiarise yourself with the new standards. Some aspects of the standards may require you to undertake additional education such as Māori health, cultural safety and critical reasoning that leads to developing differential diagnoses.
- You may need to familiarise yourself with kupu Māori used in the document. The Council has provided a glossary of terms to support your knowledge and will provide further guidance. We also encourage you to discuss your educational needs with your employer who will be able to offer support.

## **Will I be assessed differently to meet the new standards of competence?**

- Yes, the new standards of competence will mean that you will be assessed against these updated standards. Your ability to demonstrate you meet these new standards will be essential as part of PDRP and the Council's continuing competence audit.



# When do the changes take effect?

- The full scope statement and standards of competence are available on the Council's [website](#). This includes a glossary of terms.
- The continuing competence requirements are changing – please see the Council [website](#) for more information about the changes.
- **01 April 2025** for Nursing Council continuing competence revalidation requirements and APC declaration.
- **From February 2025 to 01 January 2026** the standards of competence will be transitioned to practice for all other purposes including PDRP and the management of competence concerns.

